

# **The Zionist Left under Police Control\***

## **Some notes on the Participants in the Left Zionist Movement in Hungary between the World Wars**

by  
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In the archive of the Institute of History of the party is the register of the Hungarian Royal State Police, consisting of some 40,000 identity cards.<sup>1</sup> This register is not complete, part of it was lost during the war and it may be that some of it has been selectively censored.

The register contains details of: participants in communist organisations, and those involved in prohibited Social Democratic activities; strikers; those who participated in politics under the Soviet Republic in 1919; Soviet prisoners of war from the Great War; critics of Royalty (i.e. the Regent Horthy); those who had come to the attention of the military authorities; Jehovah's Witnesses; those who had sought passports for the Soviet Union; participants in Zionist movements; smugglers; after 1940, activists in the Nationalist parties (especially Freemasons from Transylvania); participants in right-wing organisations; those Arrowcross members who had taken part in demonstrations; and finally, those who were sought by the Gestapo or by the Italian police.

On the cards, we find the name, date of birth, occupation, religion, marital status and the parents' name and address. On the right hand corner of the card there are the details of filing followed by the reason for registration. We also find notes on the person's life after registration; for example, date and reason for the subsequent arrest and the measures taken.

In this article, I shall concern myself exclusively with the Zionists to be found in the above list. I have selected from the 40,000 cards those which are marked "Zionist".<sup>2</sup> I have found 227 such cards. In what follows I am thus only considering those people under police surveillance purely as a result of their Zionist allegiance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The archives of the Institute of Party History contain the reports of the Budapest Police Headquarters (P.I. Arch 652.) which consists of 38,333 items.

<sup>2</sup> The selection was made by Dr Edit Petri.

<sup>3</sup> An additional 400 were found which concerned people who might have had some connection with the Zionists, e.g. those who distributed an illegal leaflet entitled 'We will win, Israel' or those who took part in the fight at Tompa street. Finally, however, it was decided not to consider these 400 files but to concentrate on those which were marked "Zionist".

The 227 people involved seems tiny considering the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Hungary. In the inter-war period more than 200,000 Jews lived in Budapest alone. What conclusions can be drawn from such a small number of cases? It is an accepted fact that most of the Hungarian Jews had little knowledge of Zionism even after the rise of Nazism. The movement was unable to become widespread or to become a significant political force. The Hungarian Zionist movement was thus, the least successful in Europe.

In the period under consideration, the Hungarian Zionist movement had about 5000 members.<sup>4</sup> Of these, about 1,200 were members of the Zionist Women's Association and about 1,500 to 2,000 were members of various groups within the Zionist youth movement.<sup>5</sup> We could assume that the number of Zionist sympathisers was five or ten times greater than that but this does not change the marginal role played by Zionism in the life of Hungarian Jews. By way of illustration: the shekel payment<sup>6</sup> which showed sympathy for Zionist ideas (though this does not imply an active role in the movement) was, even in the severe conditions after the *Numerus Clausus*, an extremely small amount considering the size and economic strength of the Jewish community in Hungary.<sup>7</sup>

The Zionist movement had little effect on Jewish society, nor did it achieve much political influence. This situation changed slightly in the months following the German occupation when the Zionists, who had international connections and thus access to funds, took an active and often prominent role in rescuing Jews.<sup>8</sup> The traditional Jewish leadership and bodies lacked these connections, it should be pointed out that, by 1944, the Hungarian Zionist groups from the reattached territories had moved to Budapest, taken part in, Zionist activities and to some extent assumed leadership of the movement

<sup>4</sup>Cohen, A.: *The Hatzutz Resistance in Hungary 1942-44*. Columbia Press, New York, 1986. p.15.

<sup>5</sup>P.I. Arch 651.f.4/336.o.e.i.-25. According to the report of the Political Investigations Department of the Hungarian Royal Police, on the 4th April 1936, the Hungarian Zionist Association had 500 members. In another document of the same department (P.I. Arch 651.f. 13/27.o.e. "The Red Book" p.36-37) the membership of Hungarian organized mass movements is estimated at 2,000.

<sup>6</sup>One was considered Zionist if she/he accepted the Basel Program and by paying the one shekel sum contributed to the work of the executive committees. The shekel payment entitled one to elect the congress delegates. "Sum collected to build up Palestine. It came from a voluntary levy between 1921-29:

USA	2,190,339 £
Germany	188,232 £
Rumania	168,827 £
Poland	157,506 £
Czechoslovakia	75,473 £
Austria	31,420 £
Hungary under	2,000 £

The Hungarian contribution was one of the smallest sums." *Past and Future* 2/1930 "What is Keren Hajesod?" (Múlt és Jövő)

<sup>7</sup>In 1937 they collected 6044 shekels in Hungary which means that the Jews from Vilna and its surrounding alone gave nearly as much as the whole Hungarian Jewish population. *Mendelsohn, E.: The Jews of East-Central-Europe between the world wars*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, 1983. p.107-108.

<sup>8</sup>Schmidt, M.: *Mentés vagy árulás?* (Rescue or Treachery?) - attempts by Hungarian Jews to save themselves during the 2nd World War.) *Medvetánc* 1985 2/3 p.111-125.

in the capital. Furthermore, young Zionists from Transylvania and the Hihglands provided considerable assistance since they were already experienced fighters.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 227 cards, 176 have "communist" written on them (77%). The following divisions occur: "suspected communist" – 39 (17%); "communist sympathiser" – 18 (8%); "communist activity" – 15 (7%); "communist organising activity" – 100 (44%); member of communist faction – 3 (2%).

It may be useful to give some explanation of this charge of communism against the Zionists.<sup>10</sup> After the 1919 revolution, the regime's theory was that the Jews had been responsible for Bolshevism and that communism was a "Jewish" movement. Thus, when the charge of communism was entered in the Hungarian Royal Police records it may have been written merely as a routine statement without considering whether it was a genuine case of the young leftist Jews, it is very difficult to distinguish between the leftist Zionists and the Communists. These two could often be present in parallel or one or the other could become dominant depending on age or social relationships.

Of the remaining 51 cards, 13 have the word "leftist" on them. Thus, 83% of the Zionists were seen as belonging to the Left Wing (LW). The Hungarian Zionist Association operated legally from 192 to 1941 in the whole country. Only those members of this organisation who were thought to be sympathetic to communism or to have contact with communist groups were registered. They were not picked up as a result of their being Zionists but as part of a police action designed to eradicate communism, in which those who were suspected of communists sympathies were rounded up. "A section of the youth movement set up under the umbrella of the Hungarian Zionist Association has been and still is engaged in communist activities under the cover of Zionism and is trying to subvert the Zionist movement."<sup>11</sup>

By the police the youth organisations contained three groups at this time. The Mizrahi organisation attracted those young people who were orthodox religiously.<sup>12</sup> Young liberals who considered themselves to be Hungarian Jews but thought of Palestine as the original homeland tended to join the Klal faction. The third group was the Erec Israel Haovedet. It contained a subgroup – Dror which had some religious elements but was basically LW. Its members wanted to go to Palestine where they intended to do manual work. The members of another subgroup – Noar Hadati, saw Palestine as their homeland. The most radical group was the Somer Hacair<sup>13</sup> which was extremely left-wing. Its members were atheists and communists. "Esprit de corps" played an important part in their education with members living and working together until the age of 20.

Young Zionists from time to time took part in camps or "hachsaras". On the latter

<sup>9</sup>About 600 "haluc" refugees joined the Zionist movement (Asher Cohen *ibid.* p.35.)

<sup>10</sup>"Communist activity equals Zionist activity" – from a monthly report on popular feeling in May 1941. PI Arch. 651. f. 2/1941- 7-6.000.

<sup>11</sup>Report of chief of police Sombor- Schweinitzer (cf.5.)

<sup>12</sup>In the files members of the Czeire/Czeirot Misrahi were considered to be moderate left-wingers.

<sup>13</sup>(PI Arch. 651. f. 13/27 p.41) This document states that the Hungarian Youth Organisation is "a Jewish racist organisation. The "Somer Movement" has emerged from the Youth organisation of the above mentioned movement and from the youth section of the Hungarian Jewish Pro-Palestine Association. There are indications that this movement should be put under surveillance.



the participants learnt trades or did agricultural work. In the evenings, lectures or debates were organised.

As most of the Zionists under consideration belonged to the Left Wing, it would seem sensible to use the same categories as those used by György Borsányi in his study of the Left Wing in Budapest so that our data can be compared. Borsányi selected and studied 1,800 of the 40,000 registration cards.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1. Date of registering  
Left Wing in Budapest      Zionist

pre 1932	30%	0
1932-35	44%	23%
1936-37	9%	60%
after 1938	17%	16%
	n=1800	n=227

The majority of the registrations took place between 1932 and 1935. Having dealt with the Left Wing, their attention turned to the Zionist in 1936-37.

Table 2. Date of Registration

Date	Zionists	%
pre-1932	3	1
1933	41	18
1934-35	10	4
1936	114	50
1937	23	10
1938-40	6	3
1941	25 <sup>15</sup>	11
1942-44	5	2
	n=227	

The data shows a high level of police activity in 1936-37. We are lucky enough to be able to corroborate this with an official report of the political investigation department of the Hungarian Royal Police, Budapest Headquarters (4/4/1936, no.541/2/1936).<sup>16</sup>

"The youth section of the Erec Israel Haovedet, which is part of the Hungarian Zionist Association, takes part in underground communist activities."<sup>17</sup> From this report we can also gain information about the left wing of the Hungarian Zionist Association.

Two factors made Zionist ideas increasingly attractive; the spread of racism and National Socialism and the rise of social tensions. Having been denied the possibility of integration, the establishment of an independent Jewish state became more attractive.

<sup>14</sup>Borsányi, Gy.: 1.800 Cards about the Left Wing of Budapest, Valóság (Reality) 1983. 9. pp.19-31. György Borsányi examined the following letters of the file: B.K.L.M.S.T.

<sup>15</sup>Of the 25 men registered in 1941, 20 were members of the Kolozsvár Solem Freemason Lodge (cf.27.)

<sup>16</sup>A report in the party archive assumes that the Communist Party had infiltrated the Leftist Youth Movement of the Hungarian Zionist Association.

<sup>17</sup>Report of chief of police Sombor Schweinitzer p.37. (cf.5.)

As a result of the police actions, the Jewish press responded to the problem of the search for a Jewish identity.

"Unfortunately I cannot deny that mistakes were made in the early days of the youth movement. The greatest mistake was that the Hungarian Jewish public only realised the existence of the problems of young Jewish people fifteen years too late and started to face these problems only at this time... The problems of young Jewish people began with the introduction of the Numerus Clausus, 1920 XXV. This law was introduced as a result of the demands of young Hungarian Christians who, aware of their own problems, tried to solve them in this way. The young Hungarian Jews should have concentrated their efforts at that time... Unfortunately the moment was lost by the Jewish leaders at that time who were unaware of the voice of the young Jewish people until fifteen years later." The task of organising the Jewish youth movement was undertaken in 1935-36.<sup>18</sup>

### Sex, age and marital status of those registered

Of the 227 registered, 60 were woman (26%). This 26% is considerably higher than the percentage in the Left Wing (235 women from 1800 (13%)).

Table 3. Percentage of women  
Left Wing in Budapest

	average	Gentile out of this	Jewish <sup>19</sup> out of this	Zionist
Percentage of woman	13%	9%	23%	26%

We can see from the above table that the proportion of Jewish women was much higher than of Gentile women. This may be explained by the fact that Jewish women, especially the younger ones, were more modern in outlook and were more emancipated. Jewish women, almost half of whom had secondary education,<sup>20</sup> were better educated and more aware of social and political matters than their Gentile counterparts. This stems from the different style of the Jewish family and the role of women in the family. Urban Jewish families at this time tended to be small.<sup>21</sup> One or two children required

<sup>18</sup>Katona, J.: "The Problems of Hungarian Jewish Youth" – *Múlt és Jövő* Nov. 1942.

<sup>19</sup>We mean Jewish by birth since most of those registered were not religious.

<sup>20</sup>In 1920 44.4% of female Jews had secondary education and 0.9% had higher education. This is higher in both categories than the average but while in the case of higher education the difference is minimal, it is surprisingly high in secondary education.

Secondary education Higher education

Jewesses 44.4% 0.9%

Average 27.4% 0.8%

"Statistical publication about the development of the demographic and social division in the last 50 years." from Dr Gustav Thirring, p.103.

<sup>21</sup>Barta, I.: *Die Jüdische Familienerziehung in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Diss. Tübingen, 1972.

less of the mother's time, thus leaving her free both to develop herself and to devote more time to the education of her children.<sup>22</sup>

An analysis of the date of birth on the cards reveals that 84% of the Zionist and 95% of the Zionist women were under 25. Those Zionist men and women who appear on the register are significantly younger than those who were members of the Left Wing in Budapest. The Zionist women represent the youngest the group, in fact, this group is entirely composed of young people.

Table 4. Age at time of registration

	Left Wing in Budapest				Zionist			
	average	%	women out of this	%	average	%	women out of this	%
over 40	141	8	5	2	18	8	-	-
31-40	352	20	37	16	7	3	1	2
26-30	413	22	43	18	12	5	2	3
under 25	894	50	150	64	190	84	57	95
	n=1800	100	n=235	100	n=227	100	n=60	100

92% of the Left Wing and the Zionists were under the age of 40. Under the age of 25, however, we find a significant difference, as regards age, between the Zionists and the members of the Left Wing groups in Budapest. Among the Left Wing groups, half of the members were young, whereas almost all the Zionists were young (84%). It is generally accepted that young Jews were excluded from society as a result of the increasing anti-Semitism and that they turned to the Jewish national movement which offered them an identity and a sense of pride in their Jewishness.

### Place of residence

In my analysis of the place of residence I considered every address written on the cards, 251 altogether.

On the basis of these 251 addresses, 77%, lived in Budapest. This is all the more remarkable since only 62 (27%) of the 227 were born in the capital. This suggests that the greater part of the registered youth was from the country. The records do not show when they moved to Budapest. It could also be that the addresses on the cards indicate only the place of residence when arrested. This is an important question, because, as we know from the above mentioned police report, Zionists were often picked up on their visits to Budapest for hachsara or for lectures.

"... these hachsara took place in various parts of the country, in flats rented by individual members or in the name of a Hebrew organisation or a sports club."<sup>23</sup>

75% of those who lived in Budapest lived around the Tanács krt., Múzeum krt., Üllői út, Thököly út, Rudas László utca, Dózsa György út, Lenin krt., Népköztársaság útja,

<sup>22</sup>Non-Jewish women who were interested in political or community work had greater opportunity to do so than Jewish women. They could, for example, take part in Right Wing and religious movements which – in the age of racism – were closed to Jewish women.

<sup>23</sup>From the report of chief of police Sombor-Schweinitzer (cf.5.) p.38.



in the VI., VII., VIII. districts. (Most of them lived in Dohány utca, Király utca, Bajza utca, Szondy utca, Klauzál utca, Klauzál tér, Rumbach Sebestyén utca, Kálvária tér, Szinyei utca, Székely utca, Barcsay utca.)

Most of the registered members of the movement lived in the poorer Jewish quarters. There was no address on the file from the richer parts of Budapest.

Table 5. Occupation

	Left Wing in Budapest	%	Zionist	%
workers <sup>24</sup>	1361	75	123	54
transport	29	2	-	-
trade	108	6	11	5
intelligent.	244	14	72	32
agriculture	10	0,6	-	-
housewife	43	2,3	10	4
other	4	0,2	2	0,9
no data	-	-	9	4
	n=1800	100	n=227	100

Industrial workers represented 75% of the membership of the Left Wing organisations in Budapest but only 54% of the Zionists. The second notable group is, in both the Left Wing and the Zionists, the intelligentsia; in the former group they represent 14% of the total, whereas they make up 32% of the Zionists.

If we consider only Jewish members of the Left Wing the following data appears.

Table 6. Occupation of the Left Wing in Budapest and by the Zionist

	Left Wing in Budapest			
	average	non-Jewish	Jewish	Zionists
	%	%	%	%
workers	75	84	53	54
intelligentsia	14	6	32	32
others	11	10	15	14
	n=1800	n=1294	n=506	n=227

As can be seen, both the Jewish members of the Left Wing in Budapest and the young leftist Zionists tended to belong to the same social classes, but the Gentiles show a different pattern. If we compare these numbers to the data for the whole Jewish population, we can see that the percentage of industrial workers and intelligentsia is much higher among the Zionists and leftist Jews than among the whole Jewish population.

<sup>24</sup>The category "industrial worker" is used here in a very broad sense, in accordance with Borsányi's classification. In reality, a better distribution would be "manual worker".

Table 7. The whole Jewish population<sup>25</sup>

	Jews
workers	31%
intelligentsia	25%

The high rate of intelligentsia among the Zionists is somewhat misleading since we put, following Borsányi's system, students into this category, (38 people) although there was no indication of what type of school they were attending. While for secondary school students we can more or less assume that they would become members of the intelligentsia, the same can not be said for the others. This is all the more true of the pupils who were 15 or under at the time of filing (19 persons). If we remove these groups, the rate of intelligentsia decreases to 23% which is similar to the rate among the whole Jewish population.

It is characteristic of both groups that industrial workers are in the majority, but considerable differences emerge when we look at the type of industrial work undertaken.

Table 8. Percentage of the unskilled workers of the Zionists and of the Left Wing in Budapest

Left Wing in Budapest		Zionists		Average in Budapest
Gentiel out of this	Jewish out of this	average		
20%	15%	19%	56%	48%

Although the proportion of industrial workers in the Left Wing and in the Zionist movement are the same the percentage of unskilled workers differs. In the traditional Left Wing the skilled workers are in an absolute majority (85%), whereas in the Zionist movement the unskilled are in majority (56%).

Table 9. Proportion of unskilled workers within the Left Wing in Budapest and the Zionist movement by sex

	Left Wing in Budapest	Zionists
men	18%	66%
women	35%	29%
average	19%	56%

The proportion of unskilled female workers does not differ between the two groups, whereas there is a considerable difference for the men. Thus we conclude that the Left Wing movement was composed largely of skilled workers, both men and women, the members of the Zionist movement were mostly unskilled men.

### Occupation of the women members

The types of employment found among the women differs from those of the men,

<sup>25</sup> Kovács, A.: Csonka- Magyarországi zsidóság a statisztika tükrében (Jews of Lesser – Hungary in the Light of Statistics) Egyesült Keresztény Nemzeti Liga kiadása (Publication of the United Christian National League), Budapest, 1938. p.35.



45% of the Left Wing women were industrial workers and the proportion of members of the intelligentsia was also large (31%), almost the same as at the Zionists (32%). Industrial workers are in the majority among the Zionist women (56%). This may be explained by the fact that those Jewish women who had secondary education were, after 1920, forced into industrial jobs because they were excluded from universities. Many of them chose to be dressmakers or milliners.<sup>26</sup>

### Reason for registration

In my analysis of the reasons for registration, I divided the cases into three distinct categories: the Freemasons, those who took part in "mosava"<sup>27</sup> and the Left Wing Zionists. This last group is both the largest in numbers and the most relevant to this paper.

According to the records 134 people (40 women) of the registered were Left Wing Zionists. One can read the following types of note on their cards:

"Taken to police under suspicion of communist activity. Participant in the communist movement, organized by the H.Z.A.<sup>28</sup> Belongs to the extreme L.W. Somer Hacair or the L.W. Noar Hadati, or the moderate L.W. Klal, Dror, Czeire Misrachi faction of the H.Z.A."

We also put in this category those whose card says: "Taken to police for taking part in communist activity as a hachsara member."

The vast majority of this group was registered in 1936–37 (86%), 89% were under

<sup>26</sup> Out of 60 registered women there were 20 dressmakers or milliners or they were learning these trades.

<sup>27</sup> In an analysis of the reasons for registration we should mention the Freemasons. The Freemasons, 20 men, were members of the Solem Lodge in Kolozsvár. They were registered in 1941. All of them were Transylvanian, 17 of them from Kolozsvár. In Transylvania adoption of the Jewish minority way of life became a weapon against Romanian ambitions to assimilate them. Loyalty to Zionism was widespread in this area. As will be seen, a large number or respected, successful men belonged to this movement. Both in age and the proportion of married men (85% married) the registered Freemasons were significantly different from the other Zionists (85% of this group was over 40). Their occupational distribution is as follows: manager (1), tradesmen (5), employee of private business (2), landowners (1), lawyer (4), self-employed (1), doctors (1), teachers of religion (1), chief rabbi (1), journalists (1), architects (2). Their cards say: "... member of the Solem Freemasonic Lodge, later Concordia Club, Zionist." Another group was composed of young Jews who were registered because they took part in Zionist camps and we find no other notes on their cards. In 1993 in Bernece (today Bernecebarati, Pest county) and in 1936 at Márianosztra young Zionists were camping without permission. These camps were broken up by the police. The cards say: "Was camping in Bernece in August with the cultural department of the H.Z.A. Taken to police from there. Suspected communist. Communist sympathiser. Member of the H.Z.A. Was camping with 30 others at Márianosztra without permission." 73 (20 women) were registered for taking part in camps. They were the youngest of those registered, 87% of them were 18 or younger at the time of registration. Hence 97% were single. More than half of this group (52%) were students or apprentices, 12% were industrial workers and 10% members of the intelligentsia.

<sup>28</sup> As a result of an investigation by the political department on Peter Szigeti, a student at the College of Trade, and his associates, who committed an offence against the 1921 III. Law, we discovered the following

a) 34 of the 39 put on trial were Jewish  
b) 13 of them admitted to be members of the Somer Hacair section of the Zionist movement. In the course of the investigation it has been proved that  
c) these male and female students received instructions in Communist ideology from the Somer Hacair movement that led them to become Bolsheviks. Since this time we have been keeping an eye on this movement. The 'hachsara' are under constant surveillance and hence we managed to minimise Bolshevik agitation." Sombor-Schweinitzer *ibid.* p.39 (cf.5.)

25. Nearly all of them were single (98%) and lived in the VI. – VII. – VIII. districts of Budapest, 43 % lived in the VII. district.<sup>29</sup> 74% of them were industrial workers.

The typical member of the Zionist movement was a poor, young, single, unskilled worker. People involved in the world of trade and finance, what were charactersitic of the Jewish middle class, are almost wholly absent from the movement.

Young Zionists were members of different groups within the movement:

		Table 10.		
Zionists		%	Women out of this	%
Czeire/Czeirot				
Misrachi	32	24	12	30
Klál	18	13	7	17
Dror	11	8	3	8
Noar Hadati	15	11	3	8
Somer Hacair	31	23	9	22
Member of				
Hachsara	25	19	6	15
No data	2	1	-	-
n=134		100	40	100

### Activity after registration

The records trace the activity of those registered until 1944. Those who came into repeated conflict with the authorities have updated notes on their cards which show the date, reason for the arrest and the measure taken, if any. On 24% of the cards we find these updated notes, 28 people (14%) were put under police supervision or were interned, 3 were taken to court and later sentenced to prison. People registered by the police for being Zionists were unable to integrate into Hungarian society and had difficulty reconciling their Hungarian and Jewish identities and tried to find a new identity in Zionist ideology.

On the basis of this study we can conclude that the members of the Left Wing Zionist movement were different from those who joined other leftist movements.

<sup>29</sup>In 1935 Budapest had 201.069 Jewish inhabitants. 40,6% lived in the VII district, 20% lived in the VIII. district, 25,5% lived in the VI. district. Statistical Annual 1941. Editor Olga Molnár

Table 11. Comparative figures between the Left Wing and the Zionist Left Wing, concerning some social factors

Left Wing in Budapest			Zionist
Jews	average		(L.W.)
out of this		proportion	
23%	13%	of women	30%
-	50%	proportion	89%
		of those	
		under 25	
54%	75%	proportion	74%
		of industrial	
		workers	
15%	19%	proportion of	45%
		unskilled workers	

Young people made up the overwhelming majority of the leftist Zionist movement (89%) and the proportion of women was high (30%). As with the traditional Left Wing, Zionism was a movement of the industrial workers. The high proportion of unskilled workers can be explained by the members youth and by their insecure position caused by increasing social and political pressures. It could also be that they hoped to choose and train for occupations which would be needed in the new nation.

(1986)